



Kiani misses out on taolu podium, Golshadnejad crashes out in women's kumite

Sports Desk

The second day of action at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan was one to forget for Iranian hopefuls Zahra Kiani and Atousa Golshadnejad.

Kiani, who made history by securing Iran's first-ever women's taolu gold at last year's World Wushu Championships, finished empty-handed in a closely contested changquan event at the Aichi Prefectural Martial Arts Hall, missing out on the podium by narrow margins.

Kiani, who also won gold at the 2024 Asian Championships, tallied 9.703 points in Monday's final. Hong Kong's Lydia Sham delivered a 9.713-point performance to grab the top prize, with Macau's Sou Cho Man settling for silver on 9.710, while Indonesia's Eugenia Diva Widodo took the bronze with 9.706 points.

In karate, reigning world champion Golshadnejad entered the women's kumite -68kg contest – featuring eight participants – as a



Iran's Zahra Kiani performs in the women's taolu event at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games at the Aichi Prefectural Martial Arts Hall, Nagoya, Japan, on Sept. 21, 2026. **VARZESH3**

clear favorite for the gold, but was stunned by Japan's Kama Tsubasa 2-0 to crash out in the first round.

Kabaddi victory

The Iranian women's team got off to an emphatic start in Group A by hammering the host team 63-20 at the Tokai Citizen Gymnasium.

Iran, which won the Asian Games gold in 2018 before settling for bronze in Hangzhou 2022, will be back in action against Bangladesh on Tuesday, before taking on India in a highly anticipated meeting the following day.

There was also a victorious start for the Iranian pair in men's beach volleyball, as Abbas Pourasgari and Alireza Aqajani defeated Joninho Fernandes Xavier and Joel Savio Valente of Timor-Leste 2-0 (21-12, 21-4) in their Pool F opener.

"Thank God, we took a strong first step. Everything went according to our coach's plan, and we carried out everything he had told us and everything we had practiced on the court," Aqajani said after the match.

Looking ahead to Iran's next match against Oman's Ahmed Al-Housni and Khalfan Al-Mamari on Wednesday, Aqajani said: "The Omanis are a tough opponent. We have played against them two or three times. They are a good

team, but we are focused on winning and reaching the top of the standings in our final match against Thailand."

Aqajani added that finishing first in the group would give Iran a strong chance of progressing further in the competition. "We want to finish first in the group so that we have a better chance of advancing to the later stages," he said.

Beaten by Bahrain

Iran's losing run in the men's handball event con-



Iranian karateka Atousa Golshadnejad walks off the tatami after her first-round defeat in the women's kumite -68kg event at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games at the Toyohashi City General Gymnasium, Toyohashi, Japan, on Sept. 21, 2026. **MNA**

dable opponent in South Korea today, before facing Kazakhstan on Wednesday.

Four finalists

Four Iranian men enjoyed an impressive run of results in artistic gymnastics on Sunday, booking places in their respective apparatus finals.

In the still rings, Siavash Siahi scored 13.866 to finish seventh, while Mahdi Ahmadkohani placed 11th with 13.663, with both securing spots in the final. Arman Khodaei also reached the final on the pommel horse after scoring 14.400 to finish fourth in the qualifiers.

Mahdi Olfati qualified third in the vault with a final score of 14.083, based on two attempts of 14.966 and 13.200.

Mohammadreza Hamidi finished ninth in the horizontal bar with 12.833 and was named the first reserve for the final.

The pommel horse and still rings finals will be held on Thursday, while the vault final is scheduled for Friday.

Iran water polo captain looking to overcome China, Kazakhstan hurdles to reach final

Sports Desk

Iran's men's water polo captain Mahdi Yazdankhah says the team's main objective at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games is to defeat China and Kazakhstan and reach the final.

Iran will open its Group B campaign against Singapore on Saturday before taking on China the following day at Nagoya's Nippon Gaishi Hall – a repeat of the two sides' meetings, including the final, at last year's Asian Aquatics Championships in Ahmedabad, India.

Reflecting on Iran's final setback against China, Yazdank-

hah said: "China had analyzed us very well ahead of the final. The circumstances were different when we beat them in the group stage, but in the final they had a better understanding of our style of play."

"In such matches, the teams' performances, mistakes and the details of the game can change the result and make the difference between the two sides smaller or bigger," added the Iranian captain, who was part of the squad when Iran defeated China in a shootout to win the 2018 Asian Games bronze in Jakarta.

Chasing a third water polo

medal in the history of the multi-sport event, Iran will conclude the group stage against South Korea on Monday.

All four teams in the group are already guaranteed a place in the quarterfinals, with the final standings in the two groups determining the last-eight fixtures. The captain identified China and Kazakhstan as Iran's main rivals, while acknowledging Japan's strength.

"Our main opponents in these competitions are China and Kazakhstan. Japan is also a very strong team," he said. "Our main goal is to beat China and Kazakh-

stan and reach the final." However, Yazdankhah stressed that small details can have a major impact on water polo matches.

"Water polo is a sport in which the result can change with one goal, one pass, one shot or one defensive move. There are many fluctuations during a game, and details have a very significant impact on the course of a match," he said.

Iran missed out on the podium at the previous edition in Hangzhou 2022 after suffering a shootout defeat to Kazakhstan in the bronze-medal contest, having also fallen to China in the group phase.



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Manolopoulos praises collective effort behind basketball bronze

Sports Desk

Iran men's basketball head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos said his team's bronze medal at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games was the result of a collective effort by everyone involved with the national team. Knocked out in the quarterfinals in Hangzhou 2022, Iran overcame a half-time deficit to defeat China 79-70 in Sunday's third-place playoff to secure a fifth men's basketball medal in six editions of the Asian Games, having settled for silver in 2014 and 2018.

"Before the semifinals, it seemed China were the strongest team in this competition and could win the gold medal. It was a very dif-

ficult game for us, but in the end we managed to win. We have great respect for China," he said.

"All the players who accept to play for the national team, the president and members of the federation, and the members of the team played a role in this victory and helped us," he said. "Even my two assistants and the team physiotherapist, who stayed in Tehran. Many people helped our team, and I want to thank all of them."

Reflecting on Iran's semifinal defeat by South Korea, Manolopoulos said he remained proud of his players despite their disappointing performance.

"I'm proud of my players. We played a bad game against

Korea. They are a good team and forced us to play badly," he said. "That defeat was a big disappointment for us, but I knew my team would never give up."

The coach said the players had shown the same resilience during last summer's FIBA Asia Cup and needed to put the semifinal loss behind them. "This is not only because I'm their coach; they also showed it last summer at the Asia Cup in a similar situation. We had to do the same in this competition and forget the game against Korea," he said.

"The only solution was to give everything we had in today's game. Most of the players did that, and we managed to win. I'm proud

of my players."

Manolopoulos also addressed Iran's ongoing generational transition, saying balancing the introduction of new players with the need to achieve results is particularly challenging.

"I have been involved in basketball for 45 years and experienced this process before in Greece. Changing generations and achieving results at the same time is difficult, and perhaps this has happened less often in the past," he said.

"After two and a half years, we finished third at the Asia Cup and the Asian Games. It is not easy to achieve results while changing generations at the same time. My players deserve a lot of credit."



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